**Graduate Seminar: Thinking**

Professor Susan Schneider

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We will consider two fundamental questions in this class: “what is the nature of thought and mind?” and “what exists, fundamentally?”  The first question is central to philosophy of mind and cognitive science, the second is central to the field of metaphysics. I believe that any viable answer to the first question must involve answering the second.

In this vein, we will examine various theories of the fundamental nature of reality, ranging from work on the nature of properties and substances to the nature of mathematical entities. (These issues inform a metaphysical picture of the nature of mentality, as we’ll see.) We will also explore the relationship between work in cognitive science on the format of thought (i.e., connectionism, LOT, machine learning AI techniques, theories of concepts) and metaphysical issues about the fundamental nature of thought and mind.

**Books**

* *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*, E.J. Lowe (Cambridge). (Order on Amazon)
* Mark Balaguer, *Platonism and Anti-Platonism in Philosophy of Mathematics* (order on Amazon)
* *Metaphysics: a Contemporary Introduction*, Michael Loux (we are only reading a few chapters, although the entire book is useful for newcomers to metaphysics. These chapters will be loaded onto Blackboard or put on reserve).
* *On Intelligence,* Jeffrey Hawkins (order from Amazon)

Note: We have a Blackboard (“BB”) site. I’ve asked that our books be placed on reserve.

**Grading:**

1. Seminar participation: (30%). Students will informally present the reading material (probably at least twice) and are expected to bring comments or questions on the assigned readings to each of the class meetings. Handouts should be provided for any presentations. The presentations are just informal discussions that summarize the reading and raise questions. *Please think about what presentations you want to sign up for.*

2. A seminar paper is due at end of term (20ish double-spaced pages). This constitutes 70% of the mark. Please okay your paper topic with me, and tell me about your argument – it must be focused on one or more themes of our course.

**Provisional Schedule**

We’ll update this after the first meeting, based on student ideas and interests.

(Note: Classes often spill over into the next week’s schedule, so if you miss a meeting, please confirm with someone as to what we are discussing next. I recommend exchanging emails with someone).

I’m away giving talks several weeks this term and there may be some snow days. Important dates: We do not meet the 21st and 28th of Sept. (Speaking at the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory and then at Ideafest). We will have Skype discussions, if feasible, or arrange an alternate assignment and meet for coffee when I return. (I have some fun ideas in mind).

**Meeting 2**: **The Standard Views on the Mind-Body Problem**

-The mind-body problem and the physicalist approach to the

fundamental nature of reality.

-The related doctrine of philosophical naturalism.

Reading: Chapters 1 and 2 of Lowe. Schneider and Mandik, “How Philosophy of Mind can Shape the Future” (my website, ends 6 volume history of the field).

**Meeting 3: Consciousness.**

Reading: David Chalmers, “The Puzzle of Conscious Experience.” (Google it).

Schneider and Mandik (will discuss one section only), “The Hard Problem of AI Consciousness”

Chalmers and Bayne, “The Unity of Consciousness” (more reading on this topic TBA)-Jenelle

Excerpt from Bayne’s book

**Meeting 4: The computational/cognitive science based approach to mentality.**

Chs. 1-4 of Hawkins’ *On Intelligence*. (ask Ryo which reading for his presentation)

Concepts, Reference and Meaning: Fodor, excerpt from *Concepts*. Schneider, ch. 3, *Language of Thought: A New Direction*. (We may add some background readings on direct reference and externalism.)

How does work on the format of thought relate to the metaphysical issues we are considering? (Excerpt from Schneider, “Thinking”, ms.)

**Meeting 5: Functionalism, Personal Identity, and Brain Enhancement**

Lowe, chapter 3. On functionalism.

Background for those who are unfamiliar with debates on personal identity: Eric Olson, “Personal Identity”, online (Look up the entry on “personal identity” at the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Website):

Parfit, excerpt from *Reasons and Persons*-Kristin

Alvin Plantinga and Peter van Inwagen, two papers on “Replacement Arguments”

Wider implications of the computational paradigm: machine learning (excerpts from textbook, *Machine Learning*, together with introductory video lecture from head of Google, *Deep Mind*).

Schneider, “The Philosophy of ‘Her”, NY Times (2 pages); “The Mind is not the Software of the Brain” (ms.)

**Meeting 6. Formulating physicalism:** chapters 1-2 of Stoljar (reserve)

Barbara Montero, “What is the Physical?” (at

http://barbara.antinomies.org/papers/ThePhysical2/viewHTML)

**Meetings 7-8: Physicalism, Abstract Entities, Protomentality**. Some chapters from Mark Baleaguer, *Platonism and Anti-Platonism in* Mathematics. (Drew) Chalmers, “Panpsychism and Panprotoppsychism*,”;*Schneider, “Idealism, or Something Near Enough” **(Darian-ask which)**

**Meetings 9: The nature of properties.** D.M. Armstrong, “Properties” (BB); Alex Oliver, “Properties” (BB) Simon Blackburn, “Filling in Space” (Drew) (BB); Barry Loewer, “Humean Supervenience” (discussion of an influential approach in metaphysics that makes use of properties, associated with David Lewis). (BB) Ask Celine which

**Meeting 10: The nature of substance**

Ch. 3 from Loux, *Metaphysics* (BB).

Schneider, “Why Property Dualists Cannot be Physicalists about Substance.”

**Remaining weeks:** We will cover anything we are behind on and wind up with

some systematic approaches to mentality.

Drawing from (more) distinctive monisms. Galen Strawson, “Real Materialism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism” (BB).

Chalmers, Ch. 8 of the conscious mind (on information) (BB). Excerpts from John Heil.

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